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CBI/CD/OCB
4 May 1966

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT: Coordinated Production of Intelligence on Roads in
Laos Panhandle and Adjacent Areas of North Vietnam

1. Your requirement for the production of a report on road location and status uncovered an area of weakness in the production of coordinated intelligence on roads in Laos and North Vietnam. Different organizations are involved -- e.g., NPIC and DIA -- and their differing interpretations of source materials have led to discrepancies in CIA-produced maps and publications.

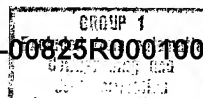
2. In order to achieve consensus within the DDI on the Communist roadnet in the Laos panhandle, the D/ODR and D/CBI agreed to convene a responsible group representing NPIC, ODR, OCI, and CBI to establish an agreed roadnet base and to establish a procedure for orderly examination of subsequent reporting of road information.

3. The first meeting of the group, called and chaired by []

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[] accomplished the following:

a. Using map no. 53733 in the Intelligence Memorandum, Communist Roadnet in the Laos Panhandle, April 1966, as a base, each road was examined to validate it as "truckable" -- indicating that trucks or truck activity (i.e., tracks) have been observed on the road; to assure that the alignment was correct; and to confirm the route number as CINCPAC-approved.

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b. To avoid discrepancies in CIA produced maps and publications, it was agreed that if any DDI component becomes aware of a new road, the component will call

25X1 [] Chief, Far East Branch, Cartography Division,
who will seek confirmation on the existence of the road
25X1 from PAG, NPIC [] and obtain from PAG the
25X1 CINCPAC-approved route number for the road. If no approved
route number exists, [] will coordinate with DIA and
indicate a tentative route number which all CIA components
will use.

c. Corollary to item b above, it was agreed that no
OBI cartographer will show a new road or segment thereof
or use a new route number without [] confirmation.

25X1 [] Chief, Cartography Division, will issue a
memo to this effect to all his Cartography components.

25X1 d. [] will keep a master base map that will
show the current road situation. All-Source Branch,
Cartography Division will keep a duplicate of this map
which will service after-hours production.

4. A monthly meeting of NPIC, ORR, OCI, and OBI representatives
will be convened to maintain the DDI ^{Comma} ~~consumers~~ on new road developments.
The OCI Weekly will be used to report these developments.

5. A status report on the overall road situation will be issued
when sufficient change in the roadnet warrants such publication. At a
minimum, the status report will be published seasonally, i.e., the next

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report will be prepared to show the effect of the summer rains on road development. An Intelligence Memorandum in the same format as CIA/BI GM 66-4 will be used for the status report.

JAMES A. BRAMMELL
Director of Basic Intelligence

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COMMUNIST ROADNET IN THE LAOS PANHANDLE*

Communist movement of men and supplies overland from North Vietnam to combat areas in South Vietnam depends on an increasingly elaborate network of roads constructed in the panhandle of Laos. The network comprises the principal part of the so-called Ho Chi Minh trail, which bypasses the extremely mountainous terrain obstructing direct movement into South Vietnam and also provides a side door into South Vietnam, thus avoiding confrontation with South Vietnamese military forces along the Demilitarized Zone. In the past year the Communists have almost doubled the mileage of the roadnet and have successfully established a continuous north-south route that extends from the Mu Gia Pass southward 250 miles to the vicinity of the Cambodian border. This enlarged network, over which moves the major part of the logistical needs of the Communist forces in South Vietnam, is essential to Communist capabilities in South Vietnam. Currently, it assumes increased importance in connection with a possible VC-mounted offensive in the highlands of South Vietnam timed to coincide with the impending southwest monsoon, the summer rainy season.

The main access road from North Vietnam is Route 15, which enters Laos through Mu Gia Pass (see Figure 1). Estimates as of early March 1966 indicated a minimum of 70 tons of supplies moved through this pass daily. Trained observers have reported that during the 24-hour period 1-2 April 1966 some 50 to 60 trucks moved south on the Mu Gia bypasses. Prior to this year the main route southward from the pass area extended along Route 23 to the Sépona area, thence eastward along Route 9 to its junction with Route 92, and finally southward along Route 92 to the area of Ban Bac. A proliferation of tracks and trails led eastward from Route 92 into the highlands of South Vietnam.

* This report was prepared in the Office of Basic Intelligence.

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15 April 1966

Sent out for coordination

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New Communist road construction during 1965-66 has extended the network and also provided alternate routes and bypasses. Route 911 now branches from Route 23 about 25 miles south of Mu Gia Pass, providing an alternate and more direct route to Sépone. Route 92 connects with Route 96, which extends to the vicinity of the Cambodian border in the south. Lateral east-west Routes 922, 165, and an unnumbered route at the latitude of Attapeu extend eastward to the South Vietnam border from this north-south overall trunk route. A new road that extends from Cambodia into Laos connects with the southern end of Route 96.

An alternative entry point to the Mu Gia Pass, which was bombed by B-52's on 11 April, will be provided by a new road that is under construction between North Vietnamese Route 101 and Laotian Route 911. The amount of work required in the continued trellising of this road (see Figure 2) indicates that the Communists probably hope to use it through the summer rainy season. The precise alignment of the road will become extremely difficult to detect from the air as rapidly growing vegetation covers the trellis during the rainy season. From the point of view of climate the new road has some marginal advantage over the Mu Gia route in that supplies can be moved overland farther south along the coast, which is relatively dry, while the Mu Gia area is receiving the heavy rains of the summer southwest monsoon (see precipitation graphs on Map 53733). Supplies might also be moved by coastal boat to the North Vietnam port of Quang Khe and forwarded into Laos over the new route, which would greatly reduce overland distance. The major bypasses elsewhere along the roadnet are those that circumvent the chokepoint (established by aerial bombing) on Route 12 in Laos, somewhat south of the Mu Gia Pass (see inset on Map 53733).

Most roads are only fair-weather roads with unimproved dirt surfaces (see Figure 3); most are wide enough for trucks. During the last rainy season, June-September 1965, Communist vehicular traffic generally stopped in the Mu Gia Pass area, and supplies were moved southward along Route 23 by coolies, bikes, and pack animals.

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Photographic analysis indicates that Routes 911, 9, 92, and 922 may comprise an all-weather route to the South Vietnam border that can be used by the Communists during the coming rainy season. Reportedly, some sections of this route are constructed with rock aggregate or corduroy. After the onset of the impending monsoon season, however, most of the route may revert to stretches of only fair-weather road, in spite of the improvements. Most of the route is aligned through an area that has very heavy rainfall; the area of component Routes 92 and 922 receives an annual rainfall of 120 to 140 inches. By comparison, the Route 23 area probably receives 100 inches of rainfall annually, and during the 1965 summer rainy season this route was impassable to vehicular traffic.

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Figure 1.

Figure 2. Partially completed vine-covered bamboo trellis camouflage on Route 911, 21 miles northwest of Sépône (photograph taken October 1965). A similar trellis is being built over much of the new road that will connect North Vietnam Route 101 and Laos Route 911. During the impending rainy season, fast-growing vines will completely cover these trellises and make detection of the road alignment almost impossible.

Figure 3. Closeup of unimproved dirt road, part of Route 911 about 16 miles southeast of junction of Routes 911 and 23. The road surface will become a mire during the summer rainy season; piles of logs will probably be used for corduroying in an effort to keep the road open to trucks. Rock aggregate may be used on some stretches.

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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PROJECT PROPOSAL	RESEARCH ACTIVITY NOTICE
SUBJECT		PROJECT NUMBER
Roads in Southern Laos and Contiguous Areas of Vietnam		61.2285
REQUESTER		SUBJECT CODE
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM		REQUESTING OFFICE
To fulfill the DD/I's request for a brief memorandum with map giving a definitive picture of the roads of Laos from Route 8 southward and the roads in the contiguous areas of South Vietnam.		DD/I
A GM format will be used.		TARGET DATE
		ASAP
		ANALYST/BRANCH
		<input type="checkbox"/> GD/F
		EST. ANALYST MANHOURS
		40 Hours
COORDINATION REQUIRED FROM		
CD/BI : For map.		
OTHER CIA: IAD and PAG/NPIC; T/TR		
NON-CIA :		
APPROVED	DATE	CHIEF, Geography Division, OBI DATE
<input type="checkbox"/>	7 April 66	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Apr 66

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REPORT RECORD				
TITLE				REPORT NUMBER
				CIA/BI G
AREA CODE	SUBJECT CODE	PUBLICATION DATE	ANALYST/BRANCH	INITIAL NO. OF COPIES
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